

ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING IN VARIOUS FAMILY AFFAIRS

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The study was undertaken to explore the role of rural women in decision making in various family affairs. Four villages of Tehsil Samundri (Dist. Faisalabad), randomly selected, constituted the universe of this study. One married female from each of the twenty nine households randomly selected from each of the four villages was personally interviewed, using a pretested interviewing schedule. In addition to some personal information about the respondents, 17 family affairs were arbitrarily listed in the questionnaire to collect data concerning the extent of involvement of rural women in decision making process. The involvement of rural women in decision making was determined on the basis of degree of consultation of husbands with their spouses in respect of various family affairs. On average, the consultation (under 'Often' consulted category) between the respondents and their spouses, to take decision in various family matters was approximately 44%. Under the category of 'Sometimes' consultation between the respondents and their spouses, the range varied from about 26 to 40%, the average being 33%. Overall average for the 'Never' consulted category of respondents was nearly 23%. A large majority (68.69%) of the respondents yet believed in dominant role of husbands in making important decisions in family affairs. Except a negligible number, the respondents agreed that they were satisfied with their position as housewives. Independent variables such as education, caste, income, family type and age of the respondents had no significant association with the decision making process in family affairs.

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of rural women in the social and economic sense has been much greater *but* strangely enough, they have not been given due credit. Sociologically speaking, the role of women in the cultural context of Pakistan has always been misconceived. Most women in rural areas are classified as housewives and less than 4% are shown as working women. Constraints on women in Pakistan are deep-rooted in cultural values, normative patterns and customs, most of which are without religious and ethical sanctions. The cultural prescriptions

coupled with long working hours, place rural women in a very weak position (Khizra, 1981). In reality, a typical Pakistani Woman lives in a small house in an isolated rural setting. She is born in poverty, lives in poverty and eventually dies in poverty (Haq, 1988).

Rural areas because of their remote *location* and comparative isolation, are no doubt more exposed to the clutches of illiteracy and ignorance, characterized by as low as 7% female literacy rate (Tikka, 1994). It is feared that gender discrimination may be more in vogue in these areas.

Decisions *taken* at a farm

household are many, varying from that of economic to social nature. Economic decisions could be concerning economic activity, while social decisions relate to life style of the family. The present study was thus planned to explore the role of rural women in decision making in various family affairs, keeping the following objectives in view:

- i. To assess the extent to which women are consulted and involved in decision making in family affairs.
- ii. To find out if some social variables such as education and caste are related with female participation in family affairs.
- iii. To find out the relationship, if any, between the selected socio-economic characters of the respondents and their education level and caste.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken in four villages of Tehsil Samundri, District Faisalabad. These villages were located 4-9 km from Samundri town and within 3-6 km on either side of Samundri-Tandalianwala road. The population of these villages ranged from 4000 to 7000. Irrigation facilities, soil type, topography, annual precipitation rate and environmental conditions were uniform. Educational facilities, however, varied a bit.

From over 300 villages of Tehsil Samundri, four were randomly selected. Twenty nine households were randomly selected for individual interviews from each village. Then from each household one married female was interviewed, using a pretested interviewing schedule. All the respondents (the number fell short by one and thus the total was 115 instead of 116) were interviewed personally. Most of the

respondents were illiterate. One dependent variable (i.e., level of respondents involvement in decision making in family affairs) was used, while there were several independent variables such as education, caste, income, family type and age.

Each item of investigation was analyzed into frequency distribution wherefrom the percentages were worked out. Chi-square test was used to determine the significance of association between independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extent of involvement of rural women in decisions making in various family affairs has been shown in Table 1. This was determined on the basis of degree of consultation of husbands with their spouses in respect of various family affairs as arbitrarily listed in Table 1.

The overall results indicating the degree of consultation between the respondents and their husbands in various family affairs, have been tabulated under three categories (Often, Sometimes, and Never) according to the frequency distribution of the opinion of the respondents. The values indicating the range of 'Often' consultation between the respondents and their spouses in decision making in various family affairs varied from nearly 35 to 53%. Of 17 family affairs listed in Table 1, only in case of three affairs the percentage for 'Often' consultation attained the level of 45% or a bit more, whereas it was only in two family affairs (i.e., day to day menu and preparing "Barri" for sons) that the respondents were consulted to the extent of a little over 53% and 52% respectively. On average the consultation (under 'Often' category) between the respondents and their spouses

to take decisions in various family matters was approximately 44%, which although is much less than even 50% yet it does not appear discouraging. Parveen (1980) and Shaukat (1985) supported these findings. The former reported that about 53% respondents were involved in overall decision making process regarding family affairs, while the latter said that women played an active role as decision makers, of course, men were dominant in most matters.

Under the category of "Sometimes" consultation between the respondents and their spouses, the range varied from about 26 to 40%. Of 17 family affairs arbitrarily listed to determine the involvement of rural women in decision making in family affairs, only in case of five affairs, consultation under this category was below 35%, whereas it was only in one case (keeping of milch animals) that the consultation level dropped to the minimum of 26.08%. On overall basis, the consultation with rural women to take decision in family affairs under 'Sometimes' category was 33%.

The range of values indicating 'Never' consultation between the respondents and their spouses regarding family affairs varied from about 8 to 38% (Table 1). 'Never' consultation category, however, accounted for more than 20% in 10 out of 17 family affairs referred to in this study (Table 1). Overall average under this category was 23%. These findings were in agreement with those of Shafiq (1994) and Jaffri (1995). The former found that rural women were allowed low level of activity in social and economic domains in critical decision making process. The latter stated that in rural areas men, the dominant force, kept women subservient. On the contrary, Charyulu and Reddy (1987) reported that rural women had a

strong dependent mentality and they mostly looked towards men for important decisions. Ali and Khan (1990) observed that women could identify problems and assist in their solution but lack of decision making power in them may be kept in view.

A large majority (68.69%) of the respondents believed in dominant role of husbands in making important decisions concerning family affairs, whereas less than one-fourth of the respondents (24.35%) were of the view that the males should have a limited role (to some extent) in family affairs. Nearly 7% respondents tended to disallow any role to the males in family affairs (Table 2).

Table 2. Believing in male superiority in making important decisions

<u>Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
To some extent	28	24.35
To a great extent	79	68.69
Not at all	8	6.96

The majority view expressed above clearly indicates that the spouses, in general, yet believe in accepting the dominance of husbands in family affairs or in other words they do not have the courage, confidence or capability to do most of it all alone.

Analysis of the data further showed that the independent variables such as education, caste, income, family type (nuclear or joint) and age of the respondents had no significant association with the decision making process in family affairs. Except a negligible number, a large majority of the respondents agreed that they were satisfied with their position as

Table 1. Extent of involvement of rural women in decision making in various family affairs

S.No.	Pertinent affairs		%		
			Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	Education of children	Male	40.00	38.25	21.75
		Female	39.13	39.13	21.74
2.	Career of children		39.13	39.13	21.74
3.	Control of day to day expenditure		41.74	37.39	20.87
4.	Overall supervision of budget		48.70	33.00	18.30
5.	Savings		45.22	37.39	17.39
6.	Day to day menu		53.04	34.79	12.17
7.	Medical treatment of son/daughter	Son	44.34	39.13	16.53
		Daughter	43.47	40.00	16.53
8.	Engagement and marriage of children		45.21	38.26	16.53
9.	Expenditures on marriage of daughter/son		40.87	38.26	20.87
10.	Dowry for daughters		48.69	39.13	12.18
11.	'Bari' for sons		52.17	40.00	7.83
12.	Dealing with friends and kinship relationing		46.96	38.26	14.78
13.	Repair /renovation of Residence		34.78	37.39	27.83
14.	Construction / purchase of a 'Pucca' house		36.53	34.78	28.69
15.	Purchase/sale of land		40.87	30.43	28.70
16.	Keeping of milch animals		35.66	26.08	38.26
17.	Sale of milk/milk products		34.77	35.66	29.57

housewives. Of 115 respondents, only eight were found to be the working ladies. Of these, four were teachers in nearby schools, one was vaccinator, and the other three were self-employed and were sewing clothes for others. All of them indicated that economically they were independent and were satisfied with their jobs.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It may be stated that at high level of consultation, the extent of involvement of rural women in decision making was almost 44%, whereas when consulted 'Sometimes' the involvement of respondents was found to be about 33%. However, overall average for the category that involved no consultation with the respondents was nearly 23%.
2. A large majority (68.69%) of the respondents yet believed in dominant role of husbands in making important decisions concerning family affairs. Majority of the respondents was also satisfied with their position as housewives.
3. It was found that independent variables such as education, caste, income, family type (nuclear or joint) and age of the respondents tended to have no significant association with the decision making process in family affairs.

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